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WASHINGTON'S

OPINION OF HIS GENERAL OFFICERS

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WASHINGTON'S  
OPINION OF HIS GENERAL OFFICERS

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THIS valuable and curious document, now for the first time printed, is the property of the State of New York, and is included among the treasures of the State Library at Albany. It is one of a number of memorial relics of Washington purchased by Act of the Legislature passed April 26, 1871, from Mrs. Ella Bassett Washington, the widow of Col. Lewis W. Washington, who was the sole surviving son of George Custis Washington, who was the son of William Augustine Washington, the eldest of the five nephews of Washington. This memorandum was uninterruptedly in the possession of the Washington family until its purchase by the State of New York.

This paper was prepared by Washington in the winter of 1791-2, after the defeat of Gen. Arthur St. Clair, by the Indians, in the autumn of 1790, near the Miami, in Ohio, and in anticipation of the necessity of the appointment of some one to succeed him in the command of the army. It was intended to serve as a memorandum of the various characters and claims to the office, of the Generals of the revolution then living, both for his personal use and for the deliberations in council with his cabinet. As the result of these deliberations, Gen. Anthony Wayne was appointed St. Clair's successor in April, 1792, and Otho H. Williams and Rufus Putnam, First, and John Brooks and James Wilkinson, Second Brigadier Generals. Twenty-three officers are mentioned in the series, and Washington gives his opinion of the qualifications of sixteen of them for the office in question, viz.: of Generals Lincoln, Steuben, Moultrie, McIntosh, Wayne, Weedon, Hand, Scott, Huntington, Wilkinson, Gist, Irvine, Morgan, Putnam, Pinckney and Gov. H. Lee.

The paper is not signed, but is entirely in the autograph of Washington. It bears an early endorsement which will serve for its title.

## GENERAL WASHINGTON'S OPINION OF THE FIELD OFFICERS OF THE REVOLUTION ALIVE IN 1791

The following list contain the names of all the General officers now living & in this country, as low as *actual* Brigadiers inclusively.— Except those who it is conjectured would not, from age, want of health—& other circumstances, come forward by any inducements that could be offered to them—& such as ought not to be named for the important trust of Commander in Chief.

### MAJOR GENERAL LINCOLN.

Sober, honest, brave and sensible, but infirm, past the vigor of life—& reluctantly (if offered to him) would accept the appointment.—

### MAJOR GENERAL BARON DE STEUBEN.

Sensible, sober & brave, well acquainted with Tactics & with the arrangement & discipline of an army.— High in his ideas of Subordination—impetuous in his temper—ambitious— and a foreigner.—

### MAJOR GENERAL MOULTRIE.

Brave, & it is believed accomodating in his temper—Served the whole of last war; & has been an officer in the preceeding one, at least had been engaged in an Expedition against the Cherokees; having defeated them in one or two considerable actions.— What the resources, or powers of his mind are—how active he may be, and whether temperate or not, are points I cannot speak to with decision, because I have had little or no opportunities to form an opinion of him.—

### BRIGADIER (BUT BY BREVET MAJOR GENERAL) MCINTOSH.

Is old and inactive;—supposed to be honest and brave.— Not much known in the Union, and therefore would not obtain much confidence, or command much respect;—either in the community or the army.

### MAJOR GENERAL (BY BREVET) WAYNE.

More active & enterprising than Judicious & cautious.— No œconomist it is feared:—open to flattery—vain—easily imposed upon and liable to be drawn into scrapes. Too indulgent (the effect perhaps of some of the causes just mentioned) to his Officers and men.— Whether sober—or a little addicted to the bottle, I know not.

## MAJR GENERAL (BY BREVET) WEEDON.

Not supposed to be an Officer of much resource, though not deficient of a competent share of understanding—rather addicted to ease & pleasure—and no enemy it is said to the bottle—never has had his name brot. forward on this acct.

## MAJOR GENERAL (BY BREVET) HLAND.

A sensible & judicious man;—his integrity unimpeached;—and was esteemed a pretty good officer.— But if I recollect rightly, not a very active one.— He has never been charged with intemperance to my knowledge;— His name has rarely been mentioned under the present difficulty of chusing an officer to comm'd, but this may, in a great measure be owing to his being at a distance.—

## MAJR GENERAL (BY BREVET) SCOTT.

Brave & means well; but is an officer of inadequate abilities for extensive command;—&, by report, is addicted to drinking.—

## MAJR GENERAL (BY BREVET) HUNTINGTON.

Sober, sensible and very discreet.— Has never discover'd much enterprise; yet, no doubt has ever been entertained of his want of spirit, or firmness.

## BRIGADIER GENERAL WILKENSON.

Is, *by brevet* Senr. to those whose names follow—but the appointment to this rank was merely honorary,—and as he was but a short time in service, little can be said of his abilities as an Officer.— He is lively, sensible, pompous and ambitious, but whether sober or not, is unknown to me.

## BRIGADIER GENERAL GIST.

Little has been said of his qualifications as a General Officer— His activity & attention to duty is somewhat doubtful, tho' his spirit, I believe, is unimpeached.—

## BRIGADIER GENERAL IRVINE

Is sober, tolerably sensible and prudent. It is said he is an œconomist;

and supported his authority whilst he was entrusted with a separate command; but I have no recollection of any circumstance that marks him as a decidedly good, or indifferent officer.

BRIGADIER GENERAL MORGAN.—

Has been fortunate, & has met with eclat.— Yet there are different opinions with respect to his abilities as an Officer.— He is accused of using improper means to obtain certificates from the soldiers—It is said he has been (if the case is not so now) intemperate: that he is troubled with a palpitation which often lays him up; and it is not denied that he is illiterate.

BRIGADIER GENERAL WILLIAMS.—

Is a sensible man, but not without vanity. No doubt, I believe, is entertained of his firmness:—and it is thought he does not want activity—but it is not easy, where there is nothing conspicuous in a character, to pronounce decidedly upon a Military man who has always acted under the immediate orders of a superior officer, unless he had been seen frequently in action.— The discipline, interior œconomy and police of his Corps is the best evidence one can have of his talents in this line, and of this, in the case of Genl Williams I can say nothing; as he was appointed a Brigadier after he left the Northern to join the Southern army.— But a material objection to him is delicate health (if there has been no change in his constitution),—for he has gone to the Sweet Springs two or three years successively in such bad health as to afford little hope of his ever returning from them.

BRIGADIER GENERAL RUFUS PUTNAM.—

Possesses a strong mind—and is a discreet man.— No question has ever been made (that has come to my knowledge) of his want of firmness. In short, there is nothing conspicuous in his character—and he is but little known out of his own state, and a narrow circle.

BRIGADIER GENL (BY BREVET) PINCKNEY.—

A Colonel since Sept. 16th, 1776; but appointed a Brigadr. by brevet, at the close of the War, *only*.— In this Gentleman many valuable qualities are to be found.— He is of unquestionable bravery— Is a man of strict honor, erudition & good sense: and it is said has made Tactics a study— But what his spirit for enterprise is—whether active or indolent;—or



fitted for arrangement, I am unable to say—never having had any opportunity to form a judgment of his talents as a military character.—The capture of Charleston put an end to his military services: but his Junr. Rank, and being little known in this part of the Union, are the two considerations most opposed to him,—particularly the latter, as it is more than probable his being a prisoner prevented his promotion: which ought not to be any bar to his ranking as a Brigadier from the time that others of his standing as a Colonel, were promoted.

The above and foregoing closes the list of *all the General Officers* who as has been observed from age—want of health—disinclination, or peculiar circumstances, can be brought into view; from whom to chuse an officer to command the Troops of the U. S.

If from either of the three Major Generals, which have been mentioned,—or from those made so by *brevet*, the Commander of the Troops should be taken, no Junior Officer can decline serving on the score of Rank; although he may desire, and have had expectations of being—first in command—himself.

Under this idea, and upon the principle of distribution, the arrangement of the Commanding officer, and those next in grade to him, may be placed in the following points of view.

#### COMMANDER.

LINCOLN . . . . or MOULTRIE.

Under either of these Major Generals might serve as Brigadiers.

WAYNE . . . . unless by being a Majr. Genl. by brevet & seeking the command himself he should recoil at it.

MORGAN . . . } for one of the above reasons would also revolt  
                          { viz—command or Williams or Darke.

WILKINSON

\* PICKENS

\* BROOKS

\* If Lincoln commands, Brooks cannot be appointed: and if Moultrie commands the same will happen to Pickens.

If Pennsylvania gives the Commanding Officer and he is of the Rank (by brevet) of Majr General; the above arrangement is equally applicable on the principle of distribution, & as unexceptionable on the score of rank. But if, in the first case, Wayne, Morgan and Williams refuse to

serve, and in the second, the two last do it, unless it be as Commander,—then some others Junr. in dates of Commission, or of inferior rank, must be resorted to.

If upon a full view of characters, and circumstances, General Pinckney should be deemed the most eligible for the command, it would be a fruitless attempt, & a waste of time to propose to those officers who have been his seniors, to engage again subordinately; especially if they have been his seniors in the line of *Colonels*: and here I would draw a line which I think is a just one—and that is—that his Colonel's, & not his Brigad'rs Commission, ought to decide his Rank as a General Officer, because it would be hard upon him to suffer in it, on acc't of his captivity; when motives of policy and not demerit suspended (as may fairly be presumed) his promotion during that period:—but why, when it did take place, Rank was not (to a certain antecedent date) restor'd, I am unable to conceive.

If this be fair reasoning (and I really think it is), neither Morgan nor Williams would have ground to object against serving under Pinckney: but as it is more than probable they will look to what is, rather than to what ought to be; a difficulty would be made on the subject of Rank—especially if there is any dereliction in them to the service in any other character than that of commanding it—and therefore it would be expedient perhaps to look for officers of Junr Rank,—& in that case may come in as . . . .

#### BRIGADIERS.

WILKENSON, whose rank is very questionable

DARKE—or HOWARD

WILLET—or SMITH

BROOKS.

If Governor Lee should be preferred to the command, then Officers of lower grades than any that have been mentioned in the preceeding pages must be sought after, as all of those are greatly his seniors—& their being, in my opinion but little ground to hope, that either the military talents which he has displayed in the course of the War, or his present dignified station, would reconcile any of them to act a subordinate part, except it be Wilkenson, who, as has been observed before, from having been but a short time in service, & quitting it at an early period of the

war, would have but little or no cause to complain.— As also Pickens, who has never been in the Continental line.— The arrangement w'd then be, in this case.—

GOV. LEE—COMMANDER

BRIGADRS.

WILKENSON

PICKENS

The authorities for the following brief biographical memoranda are Drake's Dictionary of American Biography and Gardner's Dictionary of the Army of the United States. The memoranda of the officers are given in the order of their mention in the document.

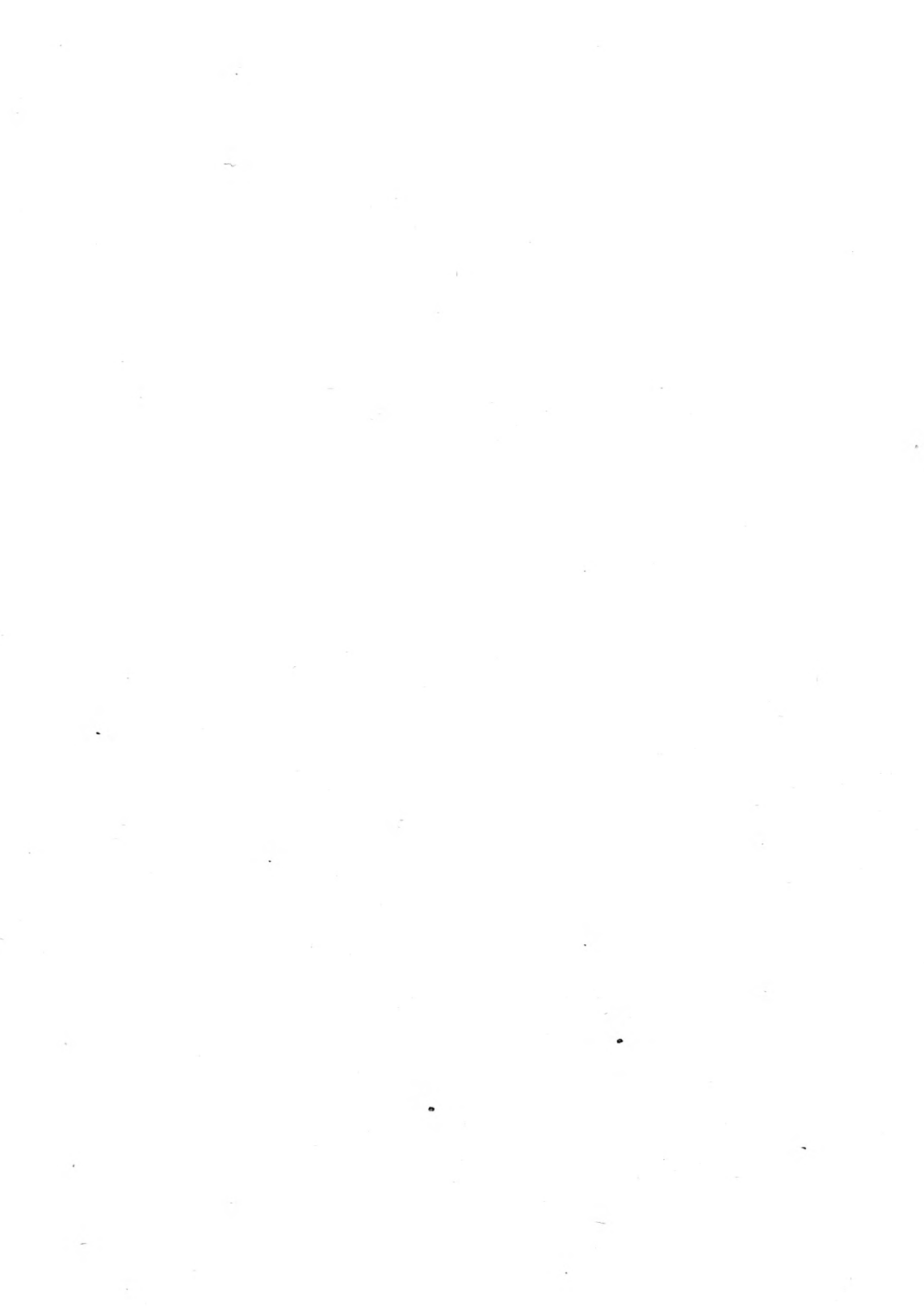
MAJOR GENERALS.—Benjamin Lincoln, born at Hingham, Massachusetts, 23 January, 1733; died there, 9 May, 1810. Baron Frederick William Augustus Steuben, born at Magdeburg, Prussia, 15 November, 1730; died at Steubenville, New York, 26 November, 1794. William Moultrie, born South Carolina, 1731; died at Charleston, South Carolina, 27 September, 1805. Lachlan McIntosh, born near Inverness, Scotland, 17 March, 1725; died at Savannah, 20 February, 1806. Anthony Wayne, born in Chester County, Pennsylvania, 1 January, 1745; died at Presqu' Isle, 15 December, 1796. George Weedon, of Fredericksburg, Virginia; date of birth and death unknown. Edward Hand, born at Clyduff, Kings County, Ireland, 31 December, 1744; died at Rockford, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, 3 September, 1802. Charles Scott, born in Cumberland County, Virginia, 1733; died 22 October, 1820. Ebenezer Huntington, born at Norwich, Connecticut, 26 December, 1754; died there 17 June, 1834.

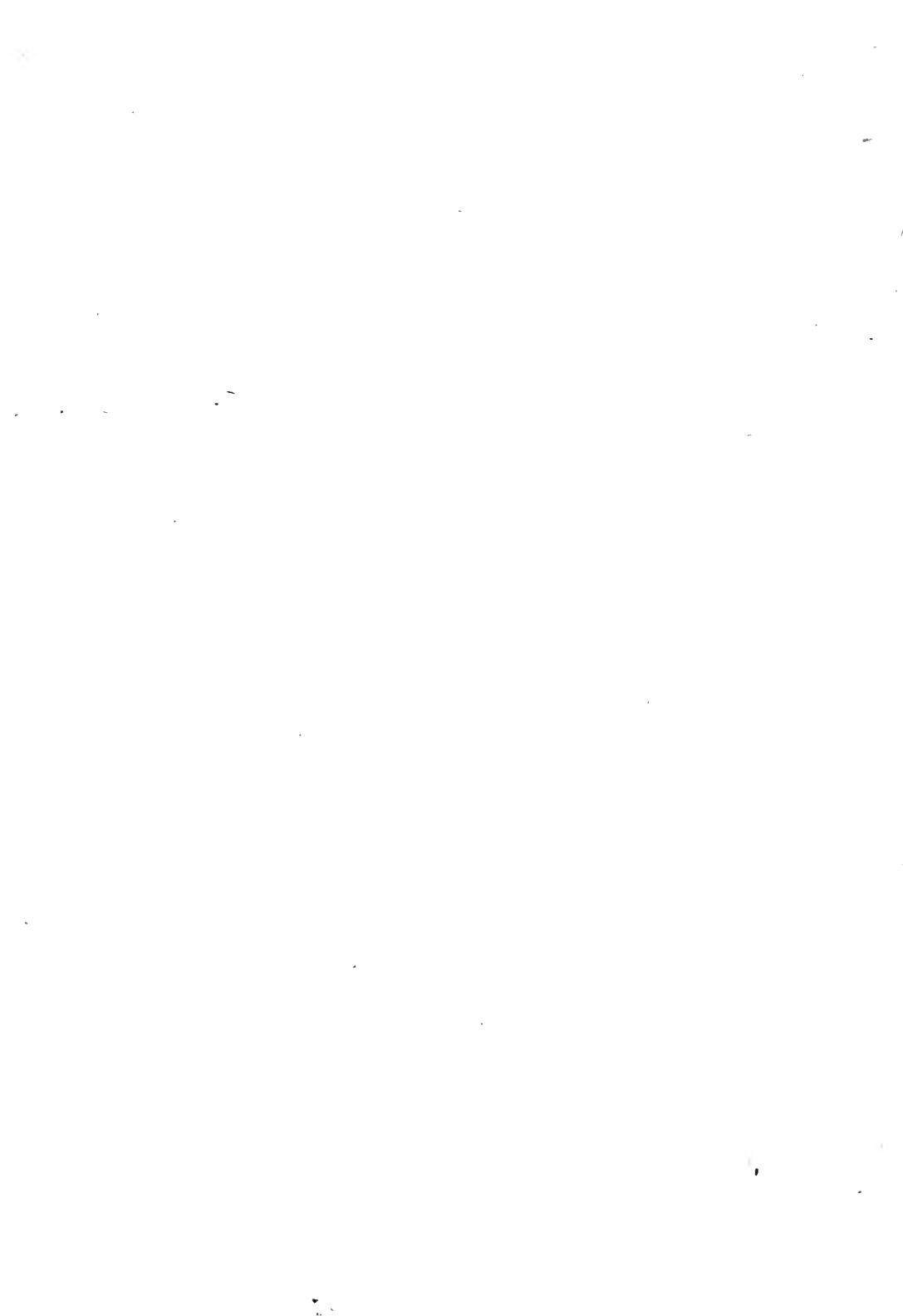
BRIGADIER GENERALS.—James Wilkinson, born near Benedict, Maryland, 1757; died near Mexico City, 28 December, 1825. Mordecai Gist, born at Baltimore, Maryland, 1743; died at Charleston, South Carolina, 2 September, 1792. William Irvine, born at Fermagh, Ireland, 3 November, 1741; died at Philadelphia, 29 July, 1804. Daniel Morgan, born at Hunterdon County, New Jersey, 1736; died at Winchester, Virginia, 6 July, 1802. Otho Holland Williams, born in Prince George County, Maryland, 1749; died, 16 July, 1794. Rufus Putnam, born at Sutton, Massachusetts, 9 April, 1738; died at Marietta, Ohio, 4 May, 1824. Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, born at Charleston, South Carolina, 25 February, 1746; died there, 16 August, 1825.

COLONELS.—William Darke, born in Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania, 1736; died in Jefferson County, Virginia, 26 November, 1801. Andrew Pickens, born at Paxton, Bucks County, Pennsylvania, 13 September, 1739; died in Pendleton District, South Carolina, 1817. John Brooks, born at Medford, Massachusetts, 1752; died 1825. John Eager Howard, born in Baltimore County, Maryland, 4 June, 1752; died there, 12 October, 1827. Marinus Willett, born at Jamaica, Long Island, 31 July, 1740; died in New York City, 22 August, 1830. William Stephens Smith, born, New York, 1755; died at Lebanon, New York, 10 June, 1816.

The Governor Lee referred to was Henry Lee, Governor of Virginia, 1791–1794, born in Westmoreland County, Virginia, 29 January, 1756; died at Cumberland Island, Georgia, 25 March, 1818.

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